

**March column for the La Jolla Light
Council President Scott Peters, District One**

On Monday, February 6, Councilman Jim Madaffer and I were joined at La Jolla Shores by representatives from the environmental, public safety and health communities to propose a new ordinance that would prohibit smoking at city-owned beaches and parks.

Some people wondered why we would focus on something relatively minor, when the city is facing so many big problems. But the city council is tasked with more than just legal and budget matters. It is our responsibility to protect the city's quality of life. Most citizens don't come face to face with a suspended credit rating or a request for documents, but they do visit their local parks and beaches. And they expect them to be safe and clean.

On that sunny February morning, one of our District One staffers spent an hour gathering cigarette butts at the Shores prior to the press conference. In just one hour, she found more than 300 butts, and that was less than a month after a clean-up project. Cigarette butts make up more than 40% of the trash picked up at local beaches. They also pose a fire hazard in our open space parks such as Mount Soledad Natural Park, and they endanger nearby homes.

A city ordinance prohibiting smoking at parks and beaches will remind people to be responsible, and will largely be self-enforced. It's a relatively inexpensive and easy way to keep one of our most precious assets safe and beautiful.

It's also the first time the city council will actually write a city law, under the new mayor/council form of government. We hope to have a public hearing on the proposed ordinance at the Natural Resources and Culture committee this spring, with a full council hearing shortly thereafter. Both meetings will allow time for public testimony, both for and against the ban. If all goes well, the ordinance could go into effect this summer.

The local media is full of stories about budget cuts, pension investigations and low morale at city hall. And yes, things have been pretty grim in San Diego. But one of the side effects of having so much bad news, is that the good news has an even harder time getting out. Despite the doom and gloom, good things are happening in San Diego.

Road improvement projects such as the 5/805 merge and the La Jolla Village Drive widening are bringing much-needed relief to frustrated commuters. Sewage spills are down dramatically, thanks to an investment in maintenance and monitoring. San Diego was recently named the best city for bicycling among cities with more than one million residents. Anyone who rides along the shore or through our canyons will agree that our trails are world-class. And San Diego remains one of the country's safest big cities; violent crime and property crime last year were at historic lows.

I'm convinced that 2006 is the year we'll resolve the city's serious legal and financial problems, and look ahead to brighter days. And I never want us to lose our focus on the day-to-day quality of life issues that affect the lives of District One residents.

Virtual Makeover

The District One website was recently redesigned, with updated information about community projects and city services. Check it out, and subscribe to our online newsletter, the Peters Press. www.sandiego.gov/cd1